



Writing on the STAAR

Writing Expectations in Middle School

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New STAAR Writing Assessment

Design and Administration of the STAAR Writing Assessment

The new STAAR Writing Assessment at 7th grade will be a little different than the TAKS Writing test.

Students must now write in two genres (personal narrative and informational). And teachers will need to learn a new rubric for scoring essays.



New STAAR Writing Assessment

Design and Administration of the STAAR Writing Assessment

Unlike the TAKS writing assessment, the STAAR will:

- Be administered over 2 days
- Be timed — **4 hours per day**
- Separate revising and editing tasks (some passages will require revising; others will require editing)
- Require two separate writing essays (**three** if you count field-test items!)
- Allow a student to pass the test, even if the student does not score a “2” or better on the writing prompts



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During the test, students will be allowed to use a dictionary and a thesaurus. The school must provide at least 1 dictionary for every 5 students testing. The school is not required to provide a thesaurus — those are optional.

The following types of dictionaries are *allowable* on STAAR:

- Standard dictionaries in English
- Dictionary/Thesaurus combinations
- Bilingual dictionaries
- ESL dictionaries
- Sign Language dictionaries



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Blueprint for the 7th Grade STAAR Writing Test:

- 2 compositions—one personal narrative; one expository
- 24 questions about editing for grammar, spelling, etc.
- 16 questions about revising for meaning, flow, etc.

PLUS Field Test Items:

- 1 composition (either narrative or expository)
- 6 to 10 revising / editing questions



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So, all together, over two days of testing on the STAAR, students will be responsible for:

- Answering up to 50 multiple choice questions &
- Writing 3 essays



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For each essay, students will be provided:

- Two sheets of scratch paper to brainstorm / draft
- One sheet of lined composition paper (with 26 lines) to write final draft



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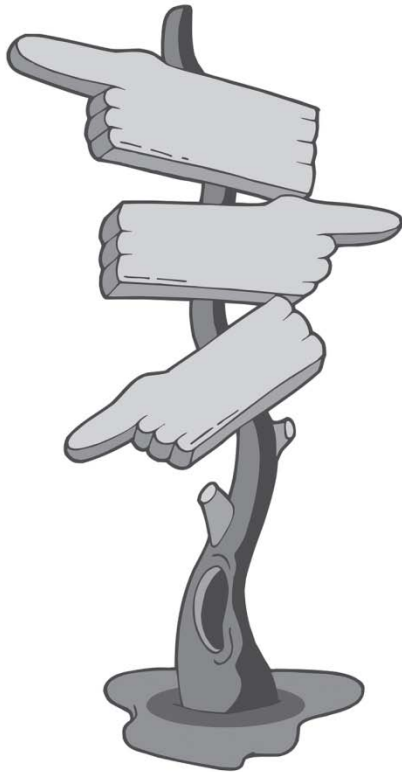
There are two different scoring rubrics ([available on the TEA website](#)). One is for the personal narrative essay, and the other is for the expository essay.

Both rubrics are built around a 4-point scale with 3 dimensions:

- Organization/Progression
- Development of Ideas
- Use of Language/Conventions

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To activate thinking, prompts on the STAAR are now accompanied by either some text or an image. For example, one sample item shows this image with this prompt:



Sometimes it's hard to make a decision because there are so many choices.

Write a personal narrative about a time when you had to make a decision. Be sure to write in detail about the choice you made and describe what happened as a result of your decision.



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Similarly students may need to read some text prior to writing their response to a prompt. For example, an expository prompt might look like this:

READ the following quotation.

A famous businessman once said, “Players win games; teams win championships.”

THINK carefully about the following statement.
Sometimes you can accomplish good things by yourself but better things with other people.

WRITE an essay explaining whether it is better to work by yourself or with a group.



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What makes an **expository essay** different from a **personal narrative**? Compare features of each:

Personal Narrative	Expository
Narrative Organization Enjoyable to Read; Good Flow Imagery and Character Development Tone is Evocative Language is Vivid and Expressive Stays on Topic; Doesn't Meander	Informational Organization Logical (but still engaging) Facts and Examples Support Thesis Tone is Informative Language is Clear and Unambiguous Clear Controlling Idea or Thesis

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Organization: Narrative versus Informational

Personal Narrative	Expository
Narrative Organization <i>“On this particular day, my sister was especially annoying...”</i>	Informational Organization <i>“There are three important reasons why it is important to stay in school...”</i>

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Structure: Good Flow versus Logical Order

Personal Narrative	Expository
<p>Enjoyable to Read; Good Flow</p> <p><i>“Tears streaming down her face, making a sound like a mix between a hyena and a banshee, my sister ran home to tell my mother what I had just done. I knew for certain that I was doomed.”</i></p>	<p>Logical</p> <p><i>“While there is a short-term cost for some people to stay in school, the long-term benefits are quite substantial.”</i></p>



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Details: Descriptions versus Facts and Examples

Personal Narrative	Expository
<p>Imagery and Character Development</p> <p><i>“She was always following me and my friends around like a lost puppy. And if we yelled at her to go away, she just gave us those sad puppy eyes.”</i></p>	<p>Facts and Examples Support Thesis</p> <p><i>“People who finish high school earn approximately 50% more than people who drop out.”</i></p>

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Tone: Evocative versus Informative

Personal Narrative	Expository
<p>Tone is Evocative</p> <p><i>“My friends started laughing – thanks to my sister and her big, fat mouth, everybody was laughing at me! My life was over. From that moment on, everybody would call me “Princess Penny!”</i></p>	<p>Tone is Informative</p> <p><i>“Studies have shown that every year a student stays in school decreases by 10% the likelihood that student will spend time in jail.”</i></p>

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Language: Expressive versus Clarity

Personal Narrative	Expository
<p>Language is Vivid and Expressive</p> <p><i>“The frustration was welling up inside of me like lava in a volcano. Any second, I was going to burst, and anybody unlucky enough to be near by was going to burn.”</i></p>	<p>Language is Clear and Unambiguous</p> <p><i>“Criminality, or the tendency to break the law, can be divided into two categories: violent and nonviolent.”</i></p>



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Focus: Plot versus Controlling Idea

Personal Narrative	Expository
Stays on Topic; Doesn't Meander <i>"When all was said and done, I realized that, even though she is an annoying pest, my sister is still my sister, and she's the only sister I will ever have.... I hope."</i>	Clear Controlling Idea or Thesis <i>"Finally, the third and arguably most important reason for staying in school is financial."</i>



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Think about those different characteristics and how they would play out in students' writing in response to the following examples of expository and narrative prompts.



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Sample **Expository** Prompt I

READ the following quote.

Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there. ~Will Rogers

THINK carefully about the following statement.

Success comes from hard work. If you are not willing to work for what you want, then you will probably never achieve it.

WRITE an essay explaining why hard work is necessary to be successful.

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Sample **Personal Narrative** Prompt 1



Hard work can be very rewarding.

Write a personal narrative about a time when you accomplished something important through hard work. Be sure to describe what you were trying to accomplish, and how your hard work paid off.



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Sample **Expository** Prompt 2

READ the following quote.

"The man who does not read good books has no advantage over the man who cannot read them." ~ Mark Twain

THINK carefully about the following statement.

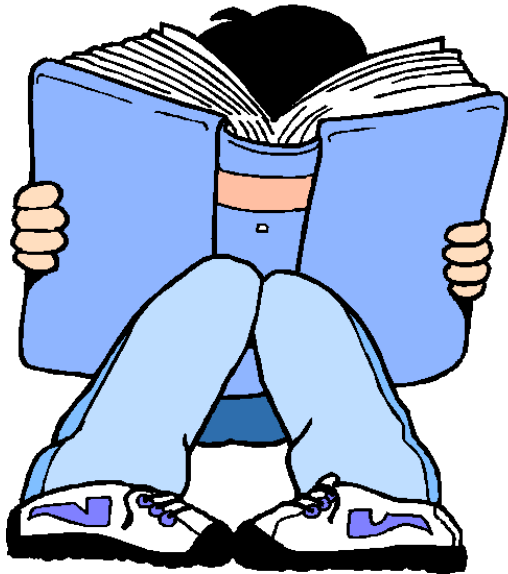
Reading is the most important skill a person can learn.

People who are able to read well are much more likely to be successful than people who can not.

WRITE an essay explaining why reading is such an important skill to develop.

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Sample **Personal Narrative** Prompt 2



Reading can take us on adventures we could never take in real life.

Write a personal narrative about a book or a story that is very special to you. Be sure to describe in detail why you like that book or story.



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Sample **Expository** Prompt 3

READ the following proverb.

The mediocre teacher tells.

The good teacher explains.

The superior teacher demonstrates.

The great teacher inspires.

THINK carefully about the following statement.

Every great person was inspired by a teacher. Great teachers help students to explore and achieve and thrive. A truly great teacher can change the world.

WRITE an essay describing a teacher who was inspirational and influential in your life.

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Sample **Personal Narrative** Prompt 3



Teachers can have a big influence on our lives.

Write a personal narrative about a teacher who has helped you or taught you something important. Be sure to describe why you think that teacher made a difference in your life.



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Sample **Expository** Prompt 4

READ the following quote.

How far that little candle throws his beams!
So shines a good deed in a naughty world.
~William Shakespeare

THINK carefully about the following statement.

It has often been said that nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something. Every act of goodness and charity, no matter how small, makes the world a better place.

WRITE an essay describing something that you can do to make the world a better place.

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Sample **Personal Narrative** Prompt 4



Everybody should try to do a good deed every day.

Write a personal narrative about a time when you did something to help another person, or a time when you did something to make the world a better place. Be sure to describe in detail what you did, and why you think it made a difference.



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Sample **Expository** Prompt 5

READ the following quote.

Modern invention has banished the spinning wheel, and the same law of progress makes the woman of today a different woman from her grandmother. ~ Susan B. Anthony

THINK carefully about the following statement.

Some inventions have had a huge impact on the way we live our lives. An invention may make our jobs easier, or it could change the way we communicate, or it might provide us with great entertainment.

WRITE an essay describing an invention that has influenced your life.

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Sample **Personal Narrative** Prompt 5



Some things make our lives easier, and other things make our lives more entertaining.

Write a personal narrative about a creation or a discovery that has changed the way you live. Be sure to describe in detail what this creation or discovery is, why it's important, and what your life would be like if you did not have it.



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Sample **Expository** Prompt 6

READ the following quote.

“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.” ~ St. Augustine

THINK carefully about the following statement.

Traveling and visiting other places can be very rewarding.
The world is a very big and interesting place. You might not be able to see all of it, but you should try to see some of it.

WRITE an essay describing a place where you would like to travel and visit.

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Sample **Personal Narrative** Prompt 6



Life is full of adventures. Some are big and some are small, but all of them are important.

Write a personal narrative about an adventure you have had. Be sure to describe the adventure in detail, and explain how this adventure influenced your life.



New STAAR Writing Assessment

New challenges for our students introduced by the STAAR:

- **Writing in Different Genres** (Expository and Narrative)
- **Stamina** (Writing 3 essays in 2 days)
- **Brevity** (Writing a good essay in one page)



New STAAR Writing Assessment

Writing exercises to help students prepare for the STAAR:

- Challenge students take a paper that scored a “4” on the TAKS and edit the paper down so that it will fit on one page (*without getting a lower score!*).
- Have students turn a personal narrative into an expository essay.
- Have students play “[Prompt Roulette](#)” with passages they have written throughout the school year.
- Challenge students to write quick essays (timed; 30 minutes), using only the STAAR Writing Templates ([Available on the AISD Website](#))
- Give students the AISD Student-Friendly Writing Rubric, and have them use it to evaluate their own writing. ([Available on the AISD Website](#))



Questions or Comments?

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